

## On Promoting the Wider Use of Spiritual Exercises

HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS XI

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TO THE PATRIARCHS, PRIMATES, ARCHBISHOPS, BISHOPS,  
AND OTHER LOCAL ORDINARIES IN PEACE AND COM-  
MUNION WITH THE APOSTOLIC SEE.

VENERABLE BRETHREN: HEALTH AND THE APOSTOLIC  
BENEDICTION.

YOU all know, assuredly, Venerable Brethren, what was Our mind and Our purpose when, at the beginning of the year, We proclaimed to the whole Catholic world an extraordinary Jubilee to commemorate the anniversary of the day on which, having received the consecration of the priesthood, We offered the Divine Sacrifice for the first time, fifty years ago. For as We solemnly declared in the Apostolic Constitution "Auspiciantibus Nobis," published on January 6, 1929,<sup>1</sup> we were moved to this partly by the purpose of calling Our beloved children, the great Christian household entrusted to Our heart by the Heart of the most merciful God, to share in the joy of their common father and to join with Us in rendering thanks to the Supreme Giver of all good. But, besides this, We were moved by the sweet hope, which pleased Us greatly, that when with fatherly liberality We unlocked the treasures of heavenly graces entrusted to Our dispensation, the Christian people would make use of this happy opportunity to the strengthening of faith, to the increase of piety and perfection, and the faithful reformation of private and public morals in accordance with the Gospel standard. From all this, as the most joyful fruit of peace and pardon obtained from God, the peace of all

<sup>1</sup>*Acta Apost. Sedis*, 1929, p. 6.

severally and of the whole society might be confidently expected.

And these hopes have not been disappointed. For the pious enthusiasm with which the Christian people welcomed the promulgation of the Jubilee did not grow cold as time went on. On the contrary, We saw it daily waxing stronger, by the help of God, who brought such things to pass as will make this year a veritable year of salvation, memorable in days to come. We, for Our part, have had abundant cause for rejoicing, since We have seen, on many sides, such noble advance in faith and piety; and We have enjoyed the sight of such a multitude of Our most dear children whom We have been enabled to receive, right willingly, into Our home, and, as it were, to press, most lovingly, to Our heart. And now, while We strive very earnestly to express Our heartfelt gratitude to the Father of mercies for the many and rich fruits which He has vouchsafed to bring forth in His vineyard, and to ripen them, and gather them together in the course of this year of expiation, Our pastoral solicitude moves and impels Us to draw from these auspicious beginnings greater and abiding advantages, to provide for the happiness and well-being of each and all, and the good estate of society.

Now, while We were considering how, or in what way, such fruits can be best secured, We thought how Our predecessor Leo XIII, of happy memory, proclaiming a Holy Year on another occasion, exhorted all the Faithful in very weighty words, which We ourselves repeated in the aforesaid Constitution "*Auspicantibus Nobis*," urging them "to recollect themselves a little and to turn their thoughts, now immersed in the earth, to better things."<sup>2</sup>

In like manner We recalled Our predecessor Pius X of holy memory, who, after ceaselessly promoting sacerdotal sanctity both by word and by example when he was keeping the fiftieth year from ordination to the priesthood, addressed a most pious "*Exhortation to the Catholic Clergy*,"<sup>3</sup> replete with precious and most choice lessons by which the edifice of the spiritual life is raised to no mean altitude.

<sup>2</sup>Encycl. "*Quod auctoritate*," December 22, 1885: *Acta Leonis XIII*, vol. II, pp. 175 sqq.

<sup>3</sup>Exhort. ad Cler. Cathol. "*Hærent Animo*," August 4, 1908: *Acta Sanctæ Sedis*, vol. XLI, pp. 555-577.

## A MEMORIAL OF THE JUBILEE

Accordingly, following in the footsteps of these Pontiffs, We have deemed it fitting to do somewhat in like manner Ourselves, and establish something most excellent, which will, We trust, prove a source of many rare advantages to the Christian people. We are speaking of the practice of spiritual exercises, which We earnestly desire to see daily extended more widely, not only among the clergy both secular and regular, but also among the multitudes of the Catholic laity; and it is Our pleasure to bequeath this to Our beloved children as a memorial of this Holy Year.

We do this the more gladly at the end of this fiftieth year since Our first offering of the Divine Sacrifice. For nothing can be more pleasing to Us than the recollection of the heavenly graces and the unutterable consolations which We have often experienced when occupied in spiritual exercises; and of the diligence We devoted to the sacred retreats, marking Our priestly course, as it were, by so many stages; of the light and the impulse that We drew from them, enabling Us to know the Divine will and to fulfil it; and lastly of the labor therein bestowed, in the whole course of Our priestly life, on instructing Our neighbors in heavenly things, and that so fruitfully and successfully, that We may rightly conclude that a singular resource for the eternal salvation of souls is set in spiritual exercises.

And, in very deed, Venerable Brethren, the importance for more than one reason, the utility and the opportuneness of sacred retreats, will be readily recognized by any one who considers, however lightly, the times in which we now live. The most grave disease by which our age is oppressed, and at the same time the fruitful source of all the evils deplored by every man of good heart, is that levity and thoughtfulness which carry men hither and thither through devious ways. Hence comes the constant and passionate absorption in external things; hence, the insatiable thirst for riches and pleasures that gradually weakens and extinguishes in the minds of men the desire for more excellent goods, and so entangles them in outward and fleeting things that it forbids them to think of eternal truths, and of the Divine laws, and of God Himself, the one beginning and end of all created things, who, nevertheless,

for His boundless goodness and mercy, even in these our days, though moral corruption may spread apace, ceases not to draw men to Himself by a bounteous abundance of graces.

#### TO HEAL THE ILLS OF SOCIETY

Now, if We would cure this sickness from which human society suffers so sorely, what healing remedy could We devise more appropriate for Our purpose than that of calling these enervated souls, so neglected of eternal things, to the recollection of spiritual exercises. And, indeed, if spiritual exercises were nothing more than a brief retirement for a few days, wherein a man removed from the common society of mortals and from the crowd of cares, was given, not empty silence, but the opportunity of examining those most grave and penetrating questions concerning the origin and the destiny of man: "Whence he comes; and whither he is going"; surely, no one can deny that great benefits may be derived from these sacred exercises.

But pious retreats of this kind do much greater things than this, for since they compel the mind of a man to examine more diligently and intently into all the things that he has thought, or said, or done; they assist the human faculties in a marvelous manner; so that the mind becomes accustomed, in this spiritual arena, to weigh things maturely and with even balance, the will acquires strength and firmness, the passions are restrained by the rule of counsel; the activities of human life, being in unison with the thought of the mind, are effectively conformed to the fixed standard of reason; and, lastly, the soul attains its native nobility and altitude, as the holy Pontiff St. Gregory declares in his "Pastoral," by a concise similitude: "The human mind, like water, when shut up around, is gathered up to higher things; because it seeks that from which it descended; but when it is left loose, it perishes; because it spreads itself uselessly on lowly things."<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, as St. Eucherius, Bishop of Lyons, wisely observes; when exercising itself in these spiritual meditations; "the mind rejoicing in the Lord is stirred up by a certain stimulus of silence; and grows by unutterable increments."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>S. Greg. M., "Pastor.," L. III, adm. 15 (Migne, *P.L.*, tom. 77, col. 73).

<sup>5</sup>S. Euch., "De laud. eremi," 37 (Migne, *P.L.*, tom. 50, col. 709).

And not only so, but it also acquires that "heavenly nourishment," concerning which Lactantius says "for no food is sweeter to the mind than the knowledge of truth";<sup>6</sup> and according to an ancient author, who long passed as St. Basil, the Great, it is admitted to "the school of heavenly doctrine and the discipline of the Divine arts"<sup>7</sup> wherein "God is all that is learnt, the way by which we are directed, all that whereby the knowledge of the supreme truth is attained."<sup>8</sup>

### A SUPERNATURAL AID

From all this it clearly appears that spiritual exercises avail both to perfect the natural powers of man; and further, and more specially, to form the supernatural or Christian man. Now, certainly in these days when so many impediments and obstacles are raised against the true sense of Christ, and the supernatural spirit, wherein alone our holy religion consists, when Naturalism, which weakens the firmness of faith, and quenches the flames of Christian charity, holds dominion far and wide; it is of the greatest importance that a man should withdraw himself from that "bewitching of vanity" which "obscureth good things"<sup>9</sup> and hide himself in that blessed secrecy, where, cultured by heavenly teaching, he may form a just estimate, and understand the value of human life devoted to the service of God alone; he may abhor the turpitude of sin; he may conceive the holy fear of God; he may clearly see unveiled the vanity of earthly things; and, stirred up by the precepts and the example of Him who is "the way, the truth and the life,"<sup>10</sup> he may put off the old man,<sup>11</sup> may deny himself, and with humility, obedience, and voluntary chastisement of self, may put on Christ and strive to attain to the "perfect man," and to that absolute "measure of the age of the fulness of Christ,"<sup>12</sup> whereof the Apostle speaks; nay, more, may endeavor, with all his soul, to be able to say himself, with the Apostle: "I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me."<sup>13</sup> By these

<sup>6</sup>Lactant., "De falsa relig.," L. I., c. 1 (Migne, *P.L.*, tom. 6, col. 118).

<sup>7</sup>S. Basil. M., "De laude solitariae vitae" *initio* (Opera omnia. Venetiis, 1751, tom. II, p. 379).

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Wisdom iv, 12.

<sup>10</sup>John xiv, 6.

<sup>11</sup>Rom. xiii, 14.

<sup>12</sup>Ephes. iv, 13.

<sup>13</sup>Galat. ii, 20.

degrees, indeed, the soul goes upward to consummate perfection, and is most sweetly united to God by the help of Divine grace, which is obtained in greater abundance during these days, by more fervent prayers, and more frequent reception of the sacred mysteries.

#### BRINGING PEACE OF SOUL

These fruits, assuredly, Venerable Brethren, are singular and most excellent, and far surpassing nature; and in obtaining them alone are to be found the quiet, and happiness, and true peace for which the human mind longingly thirsts; and which the society of today, carried away by the heat of temptations, vainly seeks in the hungry quest of uncertain and fleeting goods, and in the tumult of a perturbed life. On the other hand, we are clearly taught that in spiritual exercises there is a wonderful power of bringing peace to men and of carrying them upwards to holiness of life; which has been proved by daily experience in former ages, and perhaps yet more clearly in our own: for we can hardly number those who, being duly exercised in a sacred retreat, come forth from it "rooted and built up"<sup>14</sup> in Christ; filled with light, heaped up with joy, and flooded with that peace which "surpasseth all understanding."<sup>15</sup>

#### THE APOSTOLIC SPIRIT

Moreover, from this perfection of Christian life, which is manifestly obtained from spiritual exercises, besides that inward peace of the soul, there springs forth spontaneously another most choice fruit, which redounds to the great advantage of the social life: namely, that desire of gaining souls to Christ which is known as the apostolic spirit. For it is the genuine effect of charity that the just soul, in whom God dwells by grace, burns in a wondrous way to call others to share in the knowledge and love of that Infinite Good which she has attained and possesses.

Now, in this our age, human society is in so much need of spiritual graces. The foreign mission fields, which "are white already to harvest"<sup>16</sup> demand, more and more, the care of apostles adequate to their need. Our own regions,

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<sup>14</sup>Coloss. ii, 7.

<sup>15</sup>Philipp. iv, 7.

<sup>16</sup>John iv, 35.

likewise, require elect bands of men, of the secular and regular clergy, as faithful dispensers of the mysteries of God; and compact companies of pious laymen, who, united to the Apostolic Hierarchy by close bonds of charity, may help it with active industry, devoting themselves to the manifold works and labors of Catholic Action. And We, Venerable Brethren, being taught by history, regard these sacred retreats for exercises as upper chambers, raised by God, wherein any one of generous mind, supported by the help of Divine grace, illuminated by eternal truths, and exhorted by the example of Christ, may not only see clearly the value of souls, and be inflamed with the desire of helping them, in whatsoever state of life he sees, on careful examination, he is called to serve his Creator; but may, likewise, learn the ardent spirit of the apostolate, its diligence, its labors, its deeds of daring.

#### AFTER THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST

Furthermore, Our Lord often made use of this method in forming the preachers of the Gospel. For the Divine Master Himself, not content with having spent long years in the domestic retreat of Nazareth, before he shone forth in full light before the nations, and taught them heavenly things by His word, chose to spend full forty days in a desert wilderness. Nay, more, in the midst of His evangelical labors, He was wont to invite His Apostles to the friendly silence of retreat: "Come apart into a desert place, and rest a little,"<sup>17</sup> and when He left this earth of sorrows to go to heaven, He willed that these same Apostles and His disciples should be polished and perfected in the upper chamber at Jerusalem, where for the space of ten days, "persevering with one mind in prayer,"<sup>18</sup> they were made worthy to receive the Holy Spirit: surely a memorable retreat, which first foreshadowed spiritual exercises; from which the Church came forth endowed with virtue and perpetual strength; and in which, in the presence of the Virgin Mary Mother of God, and aided by her powerful patronage, those also were instituted whom we may rightly call precursors of Catholic Action.

<sup>17</sup>Mark vi, 31.

<sup>18</sup>Acts i, 14.

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## IN THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

From that day, the use of spiritual exercises if not under the same name and in the modern manner, at least in substance, "became familiar among the primitive Christians,"<sup>19</sup> as St. Francis of Sales taught, and as appears from clear indications in the writings of the holy Fathers. For it is thus St. Jerome exhorts the noble lady Celantia: "Choose to thyself a suitable place, remote from the noise of the household, whither thou mayst betake thyself as to a haven. Let there be there so much care in Divine reading, such frequent turns of prayers, such steadfast thought of things to come, that thou mayst redeem the occupations of other hours by this vacation. We do not say this to withdraw thee from thine own; nay, rather we say it that thou mayst learn there and meditate how thou shouldst show thyself to thine own."<sup>20</sup> And St. Peter Chrysologus, Bishop of Ravenna, in the same age as St. Jerome, urges the Faithful with this famous invitation: "We have given a year to the body, let us give days to the soul. . . . Let us live to God a little who have lived the whole time to the world. Let the Divine voice sound in our ears: let not the noise of the household confuse our hearing. . . . Being thus armed, brethren, and thus instructed let us declare war on sins . . . secure of victory."<sup>21</sup>

## IN SUCCEEDING AGES

But as time went on, men were still held by the desire of placid solitude wherein, away from witnesses, the soul might give attention; nay more, it is found that in the most turbulent ages of human society men athirst for justice and truth were the more vehemently urged by the Divine Spirit to seek the solitude "in order being free from bodily desires they might more often be intent on Divine wisdom in the court of the mind where, all the tumult of earthly cares being silent, they may rejoice in holy meditations and eternal delights."<sup>22</sup>

Now after God in His supreme providence had raised

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<sup>19</sup>S. François de Sales, "Traité de l'Amour de Dieu," L. XII, c. 8.

<sup>20</sup>S. Hieronym., Ep. 148 ad Celant., 24 (Migne, *P.L.*, tom. 22, col. 1,216).

<sup>21</sup>S. Petr. Chrysolog., serm. 12 (Migne, *P.L.*, tom. 52, col. 186).

<sup>22</sup>S. Leo M., serm. 19 (Migne, *P.L.*, tom. 54, col. 186).

up many men in His Church, abundantly endowed with supernatural gifts and conspicuous as masters of the supernatural life who set forth wise rules, and approved ascetical methods, whether from Divine revelation, or from their own practice, or from the experience of former times; by the disposition of Divine Providence, in like manner, the Spiritual Exercises, properly so called, were given to the world by the work of the illustrious servant of God, St. Ignatius of Loyola—"a treasure," as it is called by that venerable man of the Order of St. Benedict, Louis of Blois, whose opinion is cited by St. Alphonsus Liguori in a very beautiful letter "on making the Exercises in solitude"—"A treasure which God has set open for His Church in these last ages, and for which abundant thanksgiving should be rendered to Him."<sup>23</sup>

From these Spiritual Exercises, whose fame spread very rapidly in the Church, many drew a stimulus to make them run with more alacrity in the paths of sanctity. And among these was one most dear to Us on many grounds, Our venerable St. Charles Borromeo, who as We have mentioned on another occasion, spread their use among the clergy and the people;<sup>24</sup> and by his care and authority enriched them with appropriate rules and directions; and what is more, established a house for the special purpose of cultivating the Ignatian meditations. This house, which he called the Asceterium, was, so far as we know, the first among the many houses of this kind, which, by happy imitation have flourished everywhere.

#### HOUSES OF RETREAT

As the estimation of the Exercises grew continually greater in the Church, there was a marvelous multiplication of these houses, which may be called most opportune places of entertainment, set in the arid desert of the world, wherein the Faithful of both sexes are separately recreated and refreshed with spiritual nourishment. And after the cruel carnage of a war which has so bitterly troubled the human family, after so many wounds inflicted on the spiritual and civil prosperity of the peoples, who can count the vast

<sup>23</sup>S. Alf. M. de Liguori, *Lettera sull' utilita degli Esercizi in solitudine*: Opere ascet. (Marietti, 1847), vol. III, p. 616.

<sup>24</sup>Const. Apost. "Summorum Pontificum," July 25, 1922; *Acta Apost. Sedis*, 1922, p. 421.

number of those who having seen the fallacious hopes they cherished fail and fade away, clearly understood that earthly things must give place to those of heaven, and, by the most present aid of the Divine Spirit, fled to seek true peace of mind in holy retreats? Let all those remain as a manifest proof, who, whether drawn by the beauty of a more holy and more perfect life, or tossed by the turbid tempests of the time, or moved by the solitudes of life, or beset by the frauds and fallacies of the world, or fighting against the deadly plague of Rationalism, or allured by the fascination of the senses, withdrawing themselves into those holy houses, have tasted again the peace of solitude, all the sweeter to them because of the heavy labors they had borne, and meditating on heavenly things, have ordered their life in accordance with supernatural lessons.

We, therefore, Venerable Brethren, rejoicing in these happy beginnings of a noble piety, and seeing in its further extension a powerful help against the evils that assail us, must, at the same time, endeavor, as far as in Us lies, to second the most sweet counsel of the Divine Goodness; so that this secret call, breathed by the Holy Spirit into the minds of men, may not be deprived of the much-desired abundance of heavenly graces.

#### RETREATS HELD IN THE VATICAN

Moreover, We do this the more willingly, because We see what has already been done by Our predecessors. For, long since, this Apostolic See, which had often commended the Spiritual Exercises by word, taught the Faithful by its own example and authority, converting the great Vatican palace into a Cenacle for meditation and prayer; which custom We have willingly received, with no small joy and consolation to Ourselves. And in order that We may secure this joy and consolation, both for Ourselves and for others who are near Us, We have already had arrangements made for holding spiritual exercises every year in the Vatican.

#### THE EXAMPLE OF THE HIERARCHY

We know well, Venerable Brethren, how much store you also set by spiritual exercises; for you gave yourselves to them before you first received Sacred Orders; and again

before you were adorned with the fulness of the Priesthood; and often afterwards, in company with your priests, you have sought them anew in order to refresh your souls with the contemplation of heavenly things. This excellent practice, assuredly, is deserving of our solemn and public commendation. And We commend, likewise, no less warmly those Bishops, whether of the Eastern or of the Western Church, who, as we know, have sometimes come together, with their own Patriarch or Metropolitan, to make a pious retreat adapted to their offices and duties. We hope that this luminous example, so far as circumstances allow, may be followed with sedulous emulation. And perchance there would be no great difficulty in this if a retreat of this kind were instituted on the occasion of one of those synods which all the prelates of an ecclesiastical province celebrate *ex officio*, whether to provide for the common salvation of souls, or to deliberate on those things which the conditions of the time seem to require. And, indeed, We ourselves had determined to do this, with all the Bishops of Lombardy, during the brief space of Our rule over the Church of Milan; and, without doubt, We should have accomplished it in that first year of office, if the inscrutable decrees of Divine Providence had not disposed otherwise of Our lowliness.

#### THE PRACTICE OF PRIESTS

Wherefore, We are well assured that those priests and religious men who, anticipating the law of the Church in this matter, already frequented the spiritual exercises will, hereafter, use this means of acquiring sanctity with yet greater diligence, now that they are more gravely bound to it by the authority of the sacred Canons.

For this reason We earnestly exhort all priests of the secular clergy to be faithful in following spiritual exercises, at least in that modest measure which the Code of Canon Law prescribes for them:<sup>25</sup> and let them approach and fulfil the exercises with an ardent desire of their own perfection, so that they may obtain that abundance of the supernatural spirit, which is very necessary for them, if they would secure the spiritual advantage of their flock and win a multitude of souls to Christ. For this was the path

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<sup>25</sup>Cod. Jur. Can., can. 126.

trodden by all those priests who, burning with zeal for the salvation of souls, were foremost in guiding their neighbors on the way to holiness, and in educating the clergy; as may be seen, to take a recent example, in Blessed Joseph Cafasso, to whom We ourselves decreed the honors of the Blessed in Heaven. For it was the constant custom of this most holy man to labor assiduously in spiritual exercises, in order that, by this means, he might better nourish his own sanctity, and that of other ministers of Christ, and might know the heavenly counsels. And once, when he came forth from a sacred retreat, gifted with Divine light, he clearly showed this same path to a younger priest, whose confessor he was; and he followed it up to the highest summit of sanctity. This was the Blessed John Bosco, whose name is beyond all praise.

#### ANNUAL RETREATS FOR RELIGIOUS

As for those who, under whatever title, serve within the bounds of religious discipline, since they are commanded by law to make the sacred exercises every year,<sup>26</sup> there can be no doubt that they will bring from these sacred retreats an abundance of heavenly goods from which, as each one needs, they may draw draughts of greater perfection, and all the graces enabling them to run the way of the evangelical counsels with alacrity. For the annual exercises are the mystical "tree of life"<sup>27</sup> by which both individuals and communities may live in that fame of sanctity in which every religious family must needs flourish.

#### AN AID IN THE MINISTRY

Nor should the priests of the Clergy, secular and regular, think that the time spent on spiritual exercises tends to the detriment of the apostolic ministry. On this matter, let them hear St. Bernard, who did not hesitate to write thus to the Supreme Pontiff, Blessed Eugene III, whose master he had been: "If thou wouldst belong wholly to all, after the manner of him who became all things to all men; I praise thy humanity, provided it be full. But, how is it full when thou art excluded? Thou also art a man: therefore, that thy humanity may be whole and full, let it gather

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<sup>26</sup>Cod. Jur. Can., *can.* 595, *pr.* 1.

<sup>27</sup>Gen. ii, 9.

thee also into the bosom which receives all: else, what will it profit, if thou gain all, and lose thyself? Wherefore, when all have thee, be thyself one of them that have. Remember, I say not always, I say not often, but at least sometimes, to render thyself to thyself.<sup>28</sup>

#### FOR PROMOTING CATHOLIC ACTION

With no less care, Venerable Brethren, would We have manifold cohorts of Catholic Action polished or cultivated fitly by spiritual exercises. With all Our power, We desire to promote this Action; and We cease not, and will never cease, to commend it; because the cooperation of the laity with the Apostolic Hierarchy is exceedingly useful, not to say necessary. And, indeed, We can hardly find words to express the joy We experienced, when We learnt that special series of sacred meditations were established almost everywhere, for the cultivation of these pacific and strenuous soldiers of Christ and in particular for bands of young recruits. For while they crowd to these courses, in order that they may be found more ready and more prompt to fight the battles of the Lord, they will find there not only the help to express the form of the Christian life more perfectly in themselves, but may also, not rarely, receive in their hearts the secret voice of God, calling them to the sacred offices, and to work for the salvation of souls, and urging them on to the full exercise of the apostolate. This is, indeed, the glowing dawn of heavenly goods, and in a short time it will be followed and completed by a perfect day; if only the practice of spiritual exercises is yet more widely extended and is propagated with prudence and wisdom among the various associations of Catholics and chiefly those of younger members.<sup>29</sup>

#### RETREATS FOR WORKMEN

Now, even as in this age of ours, temporal goods and the various advantages flowing from them, together with a certain measure of wealth, have been extended somewhat freely to workmen and others hiring out their labor, thereby rais-

<sup>28</sup>S. Bern., "De consider.," L. I., c. 5 (Migne, *P.L.*, tom. 182, col. 734).

<sup>29</sup>Cf. "Ordine del giorno di Mons. Radini-Tedeschi" *nel Congr. Cattol. Ital.*, an. 1895.

ing them to a happier condition of life, it must be ascribed to the bounty of the provident and merciful God, that this treasure of spiritual exercises also has been scattered abroad among the common mass of the Faithful so as to serve as a counterpoise to hold men back, lest borne down by the weight of fleeting things and immersed in pleasures and delights of life, they fall into the tenets and morals of Materialism. For this reason We cordially commend the works for exercises, which have sprung up already in certain regions, and the exceedingly fruitful and opportune "Retreats for Workmen," together with the associated sodalities of perseverance; all which, Venerable Brethren, We recommend to your care and solicitude.

#### CLOSED RETREATS

Now in order that the joyful fruits We have mentioned may flow forth from the sacred exercises, these must needs be made with due care and diligence. For if the exercises are performed merely for the sake of custom, or tardily, and with hesitation, little or no advantage will be derived from them. Wherefore, before all things it is necessary that the mind, assisted by solitude, should devote itself to the sacred meditations, leaving aside all the cares and solitudes of daily life. For as that golden book, the *Imitation of Christ*, clearly teaches: "The devout soul makes progress in silence and in peace."<sup>30</sup> For this reason, although we regard those meditations as worthy of praise and pastoral approval in which many make the exercises together in public—for these have received many blessings from God—still we most strongly recommend those spiritual exercises which are made in private, and are called "closed." For in these a man is more easily separated from intercourse with creatures and concentrates the dissipated powers of his soul on God and himself, and on the contemplation of eternal truths.

Moreover, spiritual exercises, truly so called, require a certain space of time for their fulfilment. And though, by reason of circumstances and persons, this time may be reduced to a few days, or extended to a whole month; nevertheless it should not be curtailed too much if one wishes to obtain the benefits promised by the exercises. For even as the salubrity of a place can only contribute to the health of

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<sup>30</sup>"De Imit. Chr.," L. I., c. 20, 6.



the body of one who stays there for a while, so the salutary art of sacred meditations cannot effectively benefit the spirit unless it spends some time in the exercises.

Lastly it is of great moment for making spiritual exercises properly and deriving fruit from them that they should be conducted in a wise and appropriate method.

#### THE EXERCISES OF ST. IGNATIUS

Now it is recognized that among all the methods of spiritual exercises which very laudably adhere to the principles of sound Catholic asceticism, one has ever held the foremost place and, adorned by the full and repeated approbation of the Holy See and honored by the praises of men distinguished for spiritual doctrine and sanctity, has borne abundant fruits of holiness during the space of well nigh four hundred years. We mean the method introduced by St. Ignatius of Loyola, whom We are pleased to call the chief and peculiar Master of Spiritual Exercises, whose "admirable book of Exercises"<sup>81</sup> ever since it was solemnly approved, praised, and commended by Our Predecessor Paul III of happy memory,<sup>82</sup> already, to repeat some words We once used before Our elevation to the Chair of Peter, already, We say, "stood forth and conspicuous as a most wise and universal code of laws for the direction of souls in the way of salvation and perfection; as an unexhausted fountain of most excellent and most solid piety; as a most keen stimulus, and a well-instructed guide showing the way to secure the amendment of morals and attain the summit of the spiritual life."<sup>83</sup>

When at the beginning of Our Pontificate, "satisfying the most ardent desires and vows of sacred Prelates of almost the whole Catholic world from both Rites" in the Apostolic Constitution "Summorum Pontificum," given on July 25, 1922, We "declared and constituted St. Ignatius of Loyola the heavenly Patron of all spiritual exercises, and, therefore, of institutes, sodalities and bodies of every kind assisting those who are making spiritual exercises,"<sup>84</sup> We did

<sup>81</sup>Brev. Rom. in festo S. Ign. (July 31), lect. 4.

<sup>82</sup>Litt. Apost. "Pastoralis officii," July 31, 1548.

<sup>83</sup>S. Carlo agli Esercizi spirituali di S. Ignazio in "S. Carlo Borromeo nel 3 Centenario della Canonizzazione," n. 23, Sett. 1910, p. 488.

<sup>84</sup>Const. Apost. "Summorum Pontificum," July 25, 1922; *Acta Apost. Sedis*, 1922, p. 420.

little else but sanction by Our supreme authority what was already proclaimed by the common feeling of Pastors and of the Faithful; and what together with the aforesaid Paul III, Our illustrious predecessors, Alexander VII,<sup>35</sup> Benedict XIV,<sup>36</sup> Leo XIII,<sup>37</sup> had often said implicitly, when praising the Ignatian meditations, and what all those who, in the words of Leo XIII, "had been most conspicuous in the disciples of ascetics, or in sanctity of morals," during the last four hundred years<sup>38</sup> had said by their praises and yet more by the example of the virtues which they had acquired in this arena.

#### THEIR ADAPTABILITY AND COHERENCE

In very deed, the excellence of spiritual doctrine altogether free from the perils and errors of false mysticism, the admirable facility of adapting the Exercises to any order or state of man, whether they devote themselves to contemplation in the cloisters, or lead an active life in the affairs of the world, the apt coordination of the various parts, the wonderful and lucid order in the meditation of truths that seem to follow naturally one from another; and lastly the spiritual lessons which, after casting off the yoke of sin and washing away the diseases inherent in his morals, lead a man through the safe paths of abnegation and the removal of evil habits<sup>39</sup> up to the supreme heights of prayer and Divine love; without doubt all these are things which sufficiently show the efficacious nature of the Ignatian method and abundantly commend the Ignatian meditations.

#### THE MONTHLY RECOLLECTION

It remains, Venerable Brethren, in order to guard and preserve the fruit of the spiritual exercises which we have been praising, and to revive its salutary memory that we should earnestly recommend a pious custom which may be called a brief repetition of the exercises, namely a monthly or at least a quarterly recollection. This custom which, to borrow the words of Our predecessor of holy memory, Pius

<sup>35</sup>Litt. Apost. "Cum sicut," October 12, 1647.

<sup>36</sup>Litt. Apost. "Quantum secessus," March 20, 1753; Litt. Apost. "Dedimus sane," May 16, 1753.

<sup>37</sup>Epist. "Ignatianæ commentationes," February 8, 1900; *Acta Leonis XIII*, vol. VII, p. 373.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Epist. Apost. Pii PP. XI, *Nous avons appris*, March 28, 1929, ad Card. Dubois.

X, "We gladly see introduced in many places,"<sup>40</sup> and flourishing especially in religious communities and among pious priests of the secular clergy, We earnestly desire to see adopted by the laity also. For it would prove a real benefit more especially for those who are prevented by the cares of their family from making spiritual exercises. For these recollections might supply in some measure the advantages to be derived from the exercises themselves.

#### MEANS FOR SPIRITUAL REGENERATION

In this manner, Venerable Brethren, if spiritual exercises be extended everywhere through all the orders of Christian society, and if they be diligently performed, a spiritual regeneration will follow. Piety will be enkindled, the forces of religion will be nourished, the apostolic office will unfold its fruit-bearing branches, and peace will reign in society and in the hearts of all.

When the heavens were serene and earth was silent and night lay on the world, in secret, far from the crowds of men, the Eternal Word of the Father, having assumed the nature of man, appeared to mortals, and the heavenly regions echoed the heavenly hymn, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will."<sup>41</sup> This praise of Christian peace—the Peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ—setting forth the supreme desire of Our Apostolic heart to which all Our aims and Our labor are directed, profoundly affects the minds of Christians who, withdrawn from the tumult and the vanities of the world, in deep and hidden solitude, have pondered on the truths of Faith and the example of Him who brought peace to the world and left it as a heritage: "My peace I give to you."<sup>42</sup>

This peace, truly so called, We wish for you from Our heart, Venerable Brethren, on this very day on which by the Divine bounty the fiftieth year of Our Priesthood is complete; and as the sweet festival of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ approaches, which may be called the mystery of peace, with fervent prayers We supplicate for that peace from Him who is hailed as the Prince of Peace.

<sup>40</sup>Exhort. ad Cler. Cathol. "Hærent animo," August 4, 1908: *Acta Sanctæ Sedis*, vol. XLI, p. 575.

<sup>41</sup>Luke ii, 14.

<sup>42</sup>John xiv, 27.

And with Our mind raised by these thoughts, a joyful and firm hope as an omen of Divine gifts, and as a pledge of Our affection to you, Venerable Brethren, and to your clergy and people—that is, to all Our most beloved Catholic family—We impart the Apostolic Benediction most lovingly in the Lord.

Given at St. Peter's, Rome, on the twentieth day of December, 1929, the eighth year of Our Pontificate.

## **A Retreat Congress in France**

THE College of St. Genevieve at Versailles was the scene of an unusual convention during the Easter vacations (April 2-5, 1929), when more than 350 priests gathered for a Congress of the Spiritual Exercises. The program was planned and organized by Fathers Louis Poullier, S.J., and Albert Valensin, S.J., who acted as president and secretary, respectively, at the meetings of the four days.

The Hierarchy and clergy of France showed a strong interest in the Congress. The late Cardinal Dubois, Cardinal Charost, the Archbishop of Sens and six Bishops were in attendance, together with close to 250 members of the diocesan clergy, representing nearly all the dioceses of France, and members of more than a dozen Religious Orders and Congregations. Many of the visitors were superiors or professors at seminaries, or directors of various religious societies.

The program consisted of doctrinal, theoretical and practical papers, and discussion of problems and experiences of those who had given retreats to various classes of persons. Two sessions were held each morning and afternoon for four days, with every sign of interest in the papers and discussions. The recesses between the regular sessions gave time for smaller meetings of groups interested in particular problems which could not be incorporated in the general program.

The following selection of titles gives some idea of the scope of the Congress. "Open Retreats and Closed Retreats"; "An Attempt at Ten-day Retreats for Priests"; "Students' Retreats"; "Retreats for Young Christian Workmen's League and for Boy Scouts"; "A Retreat according to the Spirit of the Exercises"; "The Foundation"; "The Way

of Penitent Souls"; "Examination of Conscience and Interior Reform"; "The Retreat Movement in Holland"; "Retreats for Farmers in Belgium"; "The Call of the Divine King"; "The 'Election'—God's Part and Man's"; "The 'Election' in the Exercises"; "Two Standards"; "Adaptation of the Exercises in Retreat Houses"; "Retreats to Leaders of Catholic Action"; "Retreats to Those about to Marry"; "The Exercises a School of Prayer from the Testimony of Priests Who Made Them"; "In the Light of the Incarnate Word"; etc., etc.

The increased interest and understanding of the Exercises which the Congress brought about was regarded as amply justifying the effort of its organizers.

At the Pontifical Mass which opened the Congress, Cardinal Dubois read the following letter from His Holiness Pius XI:

TO OUR VERY DEAR BROTHER, CARDINAL DUBOIS, ARCHBISHOP OF PARIS.

We have heard with special pleasure that a Congress for Spiritual Exercises is to be held at Paris, presided over by Your Eminence, in Easter Week.

We are happy to observe once more the zeal and piety which urge you to promote everything which can contribute to the spiritual progress and the sanctification of the clergy and laity. We are heartily glad to see that, in order to obtain with greater certainty the precious fruits of retreats, you encourage the use of the method of St. Ignatius, which Our predecessors, from Paul III onward, have recommended, and which has been appreciated and used by so many saints, not merely for the sanctification of their own souls, but also for the good of the Faithful of all classes.

In truth, the Exercises of St. Ignatius have contributed with an entirely special efficacy to the spiritual elevation of souls and have guided them to the highest summits of prayer and Divine love by the sure way of self-denial and victory over their passions without exposing them to the subtle illusions of pride.

We Ourselves, during our sacred ministry, several times have had experience of this holy efficacy of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, and We have been able to observe

the progress to perfection which souls can reach through them.

We bless then with special pleasure all those who, from the secular clergy as well as from many Religious Congregations, as we have learned with satisfaction, have promised to be present at the Congress. And while imploring on their labors the maternal assistance of the Blessed Virgin and the aid of all the saints and the blessed who have asked and obtained through the practice of the Spiritual Exercises the most intimate knowledge of our Saviour, a most ardent love for Him, and a most perfect assiduity in following Him, We delegate you expressly to give Our Apostolic Blessing, a proof of Our fatherly love, to all who take part in the Congress.

PIUS XI, POPE.

*From the Vatican, March 28, 1929.*